

LOS ANGELES TIMES

2 November 1986

SAVED \$300,00 DURING U.S. STAY; FORMER KGB AGENT WANTS TO GO HOME WITH HIS CASH
By RONALD J. OSTROW
WASHINGTON

To his FBI captors, KGB Col. Rudolf Albert Herrmann was "a big fish" -- one of the highest-ranking spies they had snared in decades.

When they displayed him to reporters in 1980 behind a murky glass screen, a modulator disguising his voice, he had already put them on the trail of a top Soviet agent in Canada and pinpointed "dead drop" sites where Soviet operatives relayed intelligence secrets and picked up their pay.

By that time, Herrmann, now 57, had outlived his usefulness as a double agent. So the FBI gave him a false identity and staked him to \$35,000 a year, and he became a home builder and remodeler who has amassed \$300,000 in savings in just six years.

But this "practicing capitalist," as one U.S. intelligence official described him, proved also to be "a committed Marxist." And now, \$300,000 in hand, he wants to go back to his native Czechoslovakia.

In two days of interviews conducted in the presence of FBI counterintelligence agents, Herrmann insisted that life in America, for all its advantages, forced him into a "straitjacket." All the news in this country is "processed" to reflect a single viewpoint, he said.

Herrmann, a squarely built man whose gray-rimmed glasses match his close-cropped gray mustache and hair, contended that the poor are treated so shabbily here that he can no longer tolerate it. And from a personal standpoint, he said, living under a false name in a foreign culture leaves him with a sense of gallows humor but little sense of identity.

Speaking in a voice that betrayed his Eastern European origins, Herrmann said he had agreed to cooperate with the FBI only because he lacked the diplomatic immunity of many other East Bloc spies and had only one other choice -- jail. He said he decided "to save my skin and that of my family;" his wife and older son also had worked as KGB agents.

Illustrates Difficulties

His decision, beyond representing another step in the odyssey of a KGB colonel, illustrates the difficulties faced by U.S. officials as they try to make defectors feel at home in the United States. Although Herrmann rejects the label "defector" on the grounds that he always intended to go home, his departure will represent a setback for U.S. counterintelligence.

Back in Czechoslovakia, Herrmann can provide the KGB and Czech intelligence with valuable pointers about how the CIA and FBI operate.

He can relate, for example, how FBI agents constantly tailed him after he agreed to cooperate with them, using methods that he was unable to identify even with his intelligence training. "Once I fiddled with the battery in my car, and they appeared immediately," he said. "So I concluded it was something they had put on the battery."

Continued